



2011-17 Strategic Plan



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

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Washington State Fish and Wildlife Commission

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) oversees the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The Commission consists of nine members, each serving six-year terms. Members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the senate. Three members must reside east of the summit of the Cascade Mountains, three must reside west of the summit, and three may reside anywhere in the state. However, no two commissioners may reside in the same county.

While the Commission has several responsibilities, its primary role is to establish policy and direction for management of fish and wildlife species and their habitats in Washington. The Commission appoints and supervises the WDFW Director and monitors policy implementation of the goals and objectives it sets for the Department. The Commission also classifies wildlife and establishes the basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife.

Vacant Western WA position	David Jennings	Conrad Mahnken, Ph. D.
Gary Douvla (vice-chair)	Miranda Wecker (chair)	Chuck Perry
Roland Schmitt	Bradley Smith	Vacant Eastern WA position

A message from the Director

Thank you for your interest in fish and wildlife in Washington state. For more than a century, individuals and organizations have worked throughout the state to protect and restore our fish and wildlife resources and the natural habitat they need to survive. As director of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), I am inspired by our history of citizen stewardship and want to encourage everyone to join us in this important work.

This Strategic Plan sets out WDFW's priorities for fish and wildlife management in our state and strategies for how we plan to achieve them. As you will see, conservation of fish and wildlife is a central focus of this plan. At a time when human pressures are putting an increasing number of species and their habitats at risk, WDFW is realigning its work to protect the fundamental ecological processes that sustain them.

At the same time, WDFW is committed to improving hunting and fishing opportunities throughout the state. Hunters and fishers were one of the first major forces for conservation in our state, and they have continued to support responsibly resource management to this day.

In developing this strategic plan, we invited the public to comment on their priorities for the future and we listened to what they said. All of us bring something to the table when it comes to developing solutions to the challenges before us and we will continue to seek your help in defining our priorities for fish and wildlife management in the future.



Phil Anderson
Director

Mission

Preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities.

Legislative mandate (RCW 77.04.012):

"Wildlife, fish, and shellfish are the property of the state. The commission, director, and the department shall preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage the wildlife and food fish, game fish, and shellfish in state waters and offshore waters.

The department shall conserve the wildlife and food fish, game fish, and shellfish resources in a manner that does not impair the resource. In a manner consistent with this goal, the department shall seek to maintain the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry in the state. The department shall promote orderly fisheries and shall enhance and improve recreational and commercial fishing in this state."

Vision

Conservation of Washington's fish and wildlife resources and ecosystems.

About WDFW

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is the state agency charged with protecting native fish and wildlife, and providing sustainable fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities for millions of residents and visitors (see the inset "Legislative mandate).

Working throughout the state, WDFW's employees --field biologists, enforcement officers, land stewards, lab technicians and customer service representatives-- manage hundreds of fish and wildlife species, maintain nearly a million acres of public wildlife lands, provide opportunities for recreational and commercial fishing, wildlife viewing and hunting, protect and restore habitat and enforce laws that protect fish and wildlife resources.

Our much-treasured quality of life in the Pacific Northwest depends on healthy and thriving fish and wildlife populations. As the principal steward of these resources, WDFW is committed to continue building a solid organizational foundation and cooperative relationships with our partners and stakeholders that support both resource and human needs, now and in the future.

Conservation. Protection, preservation, management, or restoration of natural environments and the ecological communities that inhabit them; including management of human use for public benefit and sustainable social and economic needs. (Adapted from *The American Heritage® Science Dictionary* Copyright © 2005)

Introduction

WDFW's strategic plan is built on a hierarchy of increasing detail, from long-term Goals and Objectives to shorter-term Strategies and Projects that implement those goals. The plan documents the Department's mission, priorities and commitment to our long-term goals, which help to guide decisions and focus Department efforts to achieve desired results.

The plan was developed by Department leaders, with guidance from the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and feedback and suggestions from customers, stakeholders and WDFW employees. In accordance with this guidance, the Department applied the following principles in pursuing its strategic goals and managing toward long-term results:

- **Conserve and restore biodiversity** - Conservation of species and effective stewardship of public lands are essential in managing Washington's fish, wildlife and habitat resources. Enforcing rules and increasing voluntary compliance are critical core functions.
- **Ensure the health of our ecosystems** - Manage at the ecosystem level, integrating multiple factors into management plans to reflect the interconnectedness and interactions within and among systems. Strengthen the scientific basis for decisions.
- **Ensure sustainable social and economic utilization of Washington's fish, wildlife and habitat natural resources** - When allowing use for current public benefit and enhancing recreational opportunities, ensure consistency with our primary conservation focus. Emphasize collaboration with landowners.
- **Earn public and staff trust and confidence** - Improve and maintain sound business systems, management practices and effective communications. In allocating services, rank resource importance and revenue impacts to the Department. Strengthen and modernize communications and public education efforts. Build relationships with non-traditional Department constituents.



Introduction

This plan was developed in the midst of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. WDFW's capacity was significantly reduced as the result of a 35 percent cut in state General Fund support during the 2009-2011 Biennium, coupled with reductions in funding from other sources. The General Fund revenue forecast for the 2011-13 Biennium was revised downwards for the fourth consecutive time. In an effort to decrease WDFW's vulnerability to future reductions, the Department continues to be responsiveness to variations in General Fund support, while expanding our funding base from other sources.

Progress in implementing this strategic plan will be reviewed regularly during executive management meetings and specially scheduled internal performance reviews. Progress on projects and priorities will be communicated through staff messages and the Department's website.



Key Initiatives

Renewing Our Conservation Focus

Washington is experiencing unprecedented challenges and threats to our fish and wildlife resources, and the habitats on which they depend. Increases in population growth and urban sprawl, habitat fragmentation and invasive species have put a growing number of species and habitats at risk. In addition, the emerging threats from climate change will have profound impacts on the ecosystems that sustain life for fish, wildlife and humans.

At the core of this shift is the need to increase our emphasis on ecosystem processes and functions as a means to ensure the long-term viability of fish, wildlife, and the continued consumptive and recreational use by human populations. To meet this challenge, WDFW is embarking on a new initiative to align our work with conservation management principles, as defined by WDFW's Chief Scientists. This initiative will enable us to articulate and integrate conservation priorities and better address unmet conservation needs.

Addressing Climate Change

Increasing evidence shows that global warming and climate change are significantly impacting the earth's environment, adding to existing threats on fish and wildlife species and their habitats. Climate change is expected to result in: increased water temperatures in streams, rivers and lakes; loss of freshwater and wetland habitats; inundation of coastal habitats; increased temperatures; drought; increased wildfires; and expansion of invasive species, pests and diseases. Due to these wide-ranging impacts, natural ecological systems may lose their resiliency and become unable to support a number of fish and wildlife species.

In order to fulfill its mission to protect and preserve fish and wildlife, WDFW must ensure that climate impacts to species and ecosystems are addressed in statewide climate research and monitoring initiatives, adaptive management efforts, and renewable energy and infrastructure development. We must increase our understanding about the risks to



Key Initiatives

ecosystems and species in order to develop policy and action plans that will guide the future management of fish and wildlife in light of a changing climate and uncertain future conditions.

The state is taking action to respond to anticipated environmental impacts associated with climate change. One significant step taken by the Legislature was the passage of the state's Climate Change Act in 2008 and the passage in 2009 of legislation requiring the development of an "integrated climate change response strategy." WDFW participates on the state agency steering committee overseeing development of this response strategy, and leads a stakeholder group focused on developing adaptation strategies for species, habitats and ecosystems. WDFW will continue to work with the Department of Ecology, the state agency steering committee and other partners to ensure that the needs of fish and wildlife are represented in the final adaptation strategy submitted to the Legislature and subsequent implementation.

Within WDFW, a climate action plan is being developed, that will incorporate climate change considerations into key functions and activities, with the aim of:

- Maintaining healthy and sustainable fish and wildlife populations.
- Preventing climate change effects from pushing at-risk species closer to extinction.
- Maintaining healthy ecosystems to prevent the loss of critical ecological functions, such as protective cover and wildlife forage.
- Following sound science to make resource management decisions in regard to climate uncertainty.



WDFW is also a primary partner in other state and regional efforts, including development of a comprehensive study to assess the relative vulnerability of species and their habitats to projected climate change impacts, with preliminary products expected during the next fiscal year.

Key Initiatives

Achieving a Healthy Puget Sound

In a healthy state, Puget Sound supports an incredible diversity of fish, wildlife and habitats, as well as the quality of life that people here enjoy. However, the natural bounty of this estuary of national significance is at risk from environmental degradation. The Legislature recognized this and established a goal in 2007 of restoring the Puget Sound by 2020, naming the new Puget Sound Partnership to coordinate the effort. WDFW is a committed partner, and is responsible for delivering species and habitat science, ecosystem and habitat restoration and protection, and enforcement of environmental regulations to support Puget Sound recovery.

WDFW's commitment to recovery of the Sound is an expression of the Department's renewed conservation focus. WDFW is looking at the whole ecosystem to understand how best to:

- Deliver scientific information on key species – from marine mammals to threatened rockfish and seabirds – to assess their status, how they respond to our management, and what trends in their health tell us about progress toward Puget Sound recovery;
- Improve the condition of Puget Sound by removing blockages from streams, protecting and restoring estuary and other nearshore habitats, and bringing science and technical expertise to salmon recovery efforts led by watershed groups;
- Protect Puget Sound species and habitats by regulating construction projects in or near water that may harm fish, and enforcing environmental, fishing, and hunting laws.



Key Initiatives

Supporting Sustainable Fishing and Hunting

Under state law, WDFW is directed to “maximize recreational fishing and hunting opportunities ... in a manner that does not impair the resource.” Fulfilling that mandate has become increasingly challenging as more species are listed for protection and the amount of land open to hunting and fishing has declined. Still, the department is maintaining – and even expanding – fishing and hunting opportunities in a variety of ways:

- **Recreational fishing:** In 1991, WDFW tested its first mark-selective fishery for salmon off the state’s southern coast, requiring anglers to release any coho they caught that were not clearly marked as hatchery fish. Today, the majority of all salmon and steelhead fisheries are mark-selective, allowing anglers to catch their limit of hatchery fish while preserving weak wild stocks – many protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. If WDFW had not begun mass-marking hatchery fish for identification, many state fisheries would have been closed or greatly curtailed. In 2010, the department applied selective fishing rules to Columbia River summer Chinook for the first time, and will continue to expand those rules to other salmon fisheries in future years.
- **Commercial fishing:** The next challenge is to expand mark-selective fishing to commercial salmon fisheries on a broader scale. A mark selective fishery – using tangle nets – was initiated for spring Chinook in the lower Columbia River in 2002. Since 2009, WDFW has also been testing various types of fishing gear – primarily purse seines, beach seines and trap nets – as possible alternatives to gillnets for fall fisheries on the Columbia River. While gillnets are highly effective at catching salmon, alternative gears may provide an economically viable way for fishers to release wild fish in good condition. In addition, fisheries utilizing



Key Initiatives

alternative gear can also contribute to the recovery of listed species by increasing the harvest of hatchery-produced salmon – thereby reducing the number of hatchery fish that reach natural spawning areas.

- **Hunting:** The amount of land open to hunting has steadily declined as the state's human population continues to grow. For this reason, hunters consistently rank access to suitable hunting areas as one of their top concerns. In 2010, WDFW launched an initiative to address these concerns by providing new incentives for private landowners – primarily farmers, ranchers and timberland owners – who agree to open their lands to hunting. Initial funding for this effort was generated by changes in the application process for special hunting permits, which generated \$400,000 to improve hunter access. Based in part on that commitment, WDFW qualified for two successive grants totaling \$2.5 million for that purpose from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That money is being used to open up an estimated 200,000 acres of private land to hunters by 2015.



Financial Capacity

Like most state agencies, WDFW has experienced a precipitous drop in financial support from General Fund State (GF-S) revenues in the years following the economic downturn of 2007. Faced with multi-billion-dollar revenue shortfalls, the state Legislature imposed sharp reductions in the department's GF-S appropriations, affecting core services ranging from business services to fish and wildlife protection. New revenues generated by higher fees for state hunting and fishing licenses have helped to preserve some services, but have only partially offset reductions in GF-S revenues (which fell from 32 percent of WDFW's operating budget in 2007-09 to 19.4 percent in 2011-13). With future economic and revenue growth uncertain, WDFW is focusing on new ways to meet its core responsibilities.

Managing Reductions in Financial Support

For WDFW, the deepest budget cuts came in the 2009-11 biennium, when the department lost \$35 million (30 percent) of its GF-S revenue, along with 163 staff positions. Additional cost-cutting measures in the supplemental budget required many employees to take 10 days of unpaid leave and transferred \$5.2 million in GF-S expenses to the state Wildlife Account, which is supported primarily by fishing and hunting license fees. While a temporary 10 percent surcharge on recreational license fees helped to offset \$6.1 million of those reductions, WDFW was required to reduce funding for fish hatcheries, habitat protection and a wide range of other activities.

The Legislature also reduced GF-S funding in the 2011-13 operating budget, but adopted two measures designed to sustain fishing and hunting opportunities, reinforce WDFW land maintenance and support other activities funded through the Wildlife Account.



- **License fee restructuring:** With the 10 percent surcharge set to expire in June, 2011, WDFW proposed a permanent, broad-based restructuring of fishing, hunting and other license fees,

Financial Capacity

designed to generate additional revenues and achieve several other departmental goals (e.g. aligning fees with the costs of providing opportunities). Effective Sept. 1, 2011, the average cost of recreational hunting and fishing licenses will increase about 10 percent, although fees for youth, seniors and disabled veterans will go down. Licensing fees for commercial fisheries also increase under the new law. In all, the restructuring of license fees is expected to generate about \$15 million in the 2011-13 biennium. Most of these funds will support existing hunting, fishing and resource-protection programs that would have otherwise been curtailed.

- **Discover Pass:** Effective July 1, 2011, a new pass is generally required for vehicle access to state parks, and to recreation lands (including water-access sites) managed by WDFW and the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR). An annual pass costs \$30 plus dealer and transaction fees, and a one-day pass is available for \$10. However, a Discover Pass is not required for access to WDFW lands and water-access sites for those who display a vehicle-access pass, issued free with most annual fishing licenses and all annual hunting licenses. While the Legislature's primary goal in creating the Discover Pass was to establish an alternative funding source for State Parks, WDFW and DNR are expected to each receive 8 percent of the revenue generated by sales of the pass for land maintenance in the 2011-13 biennium.

Charting a New Financial Future

During the 2011 Legislative Session, hunters and fishers demonstrated strong support for increases in licensing fees, helping to avert cutbacks in recreational opportunities that would have otherwise been required to balance the Wildlife Account in 2011-13. In addition, approval of the Discover Pass will provide a dedicated source of revenue to address long-deferred maintenance of WDFW Wildlife Areas.



Financial Capacity

On the other hand, WDFW entered the 2011-13 biennium with a GF-S appropriation down 37 percent from the amount approved four years earlier with no lessening of its statutory responsibilities. Those dollars support a wide range of conservation efforts ranging from habitat protection to fish and wildlife enforcement that benefit the public at large, not just those who buy fishing and hunting licenses. For that reason, recent gains in the Wildlife Account are not a solution to losses in GF-S funding. The department has made a concerted effort to clarify those funding responsibilities in recent years, and does not plan to reverse that course.

But the need for additional funding nonetheless remains acute for some WDFW activities that have traditionally relied on GF-S support. The Hydraulics Project Approval (HPA) program, established in 1949 to protect fish habitat, was chronically underfunded even before losing \$1 million in cuts to the 2011-13 budget. WDFW is looking for new ways to provide adequate funding for that program along with other critical activities ranging from controlling invasive species to removing barriers to fish passage.

In addition, the department is working to forge new relationships with other natural resource agencies to achieve mutual goals more efficiently. WDFW, DNR and State Parks are working together to implement the new Discover Pass on their lands, and have also begun to look for ways to collaborate on land management, a major responsibility for all three agencies. That partnership could spark new ideas about other ways help address the revenue gap left by recent reductions in GF-S appropriations.

While no one knows when the state economic and revenue projections will improve, pressures on WDFW and other agencies to protect the natural environment and provide public access to state lands are all too apparent. WDFW is committed to working with its partners and the general public to meet those challenges in the years ahead.



Goal 1: Conserve and protect native fish and wildlife

Objective A:

Enhance conservation practices to improve protection and restoration of fish, wildlife and habitat

Strategies

1. Promote compliance with natural resource laws.
2. Identify and implement hatchery reform actions to reduce risks to native salmon and steelhead.
3. Ensure fishery impacts on native fish are reduced to levels consistent with conservation goals.
4. Initiate new and enhance existing partnerships with conservation and other organizations to help conserve Washington's fish and wildlife.
5. Complete and implement the highest priority conservation actions.

Objective B:

Increase protection and restoration of ecosystem functions

Strategies

1. Implement, and coordinate with partners on, a climate change initiative to conserve fish and wildlife biodiversity.
2. Improve compliance and effectiveness of the HPA program.
3. Minimize impacts to fish, wildlife and their habitats from traditional and new, green energy projects.
4. Promote ecosystem management to achieve conservation goals.
5. Successfully implement WDFW's near term actions as identified in the Puget Sound Partnership's Action Agenda.
6. Protect fish, wildlife and their habitats by providing the best available science to inform local government and others' decision-making.
7. Maintain and restore salmonid populations through fish passage, screening and habitat restoration.

Objective C:

Enhance and improve land and water stewardship to meet conservation goals

Strategies

1. Ensure department lands, fishways, screening structures, water intakes, dams and dikes are compliant with regulations.
2. Provide sound management of department lands and access sites.
3. Preserve and enhance agency water rights and usage that balances working landscape, instream flow, and hatchery needs.

Goal 2: Provide sustainable fishing, hunting and other wildlife-related recreational experiences

Objective A:

Increase the economic benefits and public participation derived from sustainable fish and wildlife opportunities

Strategies

1. Seek partnerships and increase awareness of opportunities for fish and wildlife and other related recreational experiences.
2. Develop and implement fishing gears and techniques that reduce the incidental fishing mortality and stocks of conservation concern
3. Increase public participation and economic benefits of commercial and recreational fishing by developing promotional partnerships, expanding sustainable fishing opportunities, and optimizing the use of hatchery programs.
4. Increase access to private lands to enhance hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Goal 3: Use sound business practices, deliver high-quality customer service

Objective A:

Maintain high-quality customer service aligned with agency priorities and capacities

Strategies

1. Enhance public communications and customer service through the WDFW web site and social media.
2. Engage stakeholders and other citizens through proactive outreach efforts.

Objective B:

Improve business systems

Strategies

1. Ensure resources are focused on highest priorities through budget and strategic planning processes, including the Department's conservation initiative.
2. Develop and maintain effective business and performance management systems and practices.

Objective C:

Effectively and efficiently manage agency assets

Strategies

1. Ensure resources are focused on the highest priorities through effective asset management.
2. Develop and maintain an effective approach to addressing the Department's deferred maintenance backlog.

Goal 4: Maintain a highly skilled and motivated workforce

Objective A:

Improve the organizational capacity by striving for excellence in recruitment and retention practices

Strategies

1. Develop and implement an affirmative action plan to increase workforce diversity.
2. Expand management and supervision training.
3. Improve the agency's hiring processes to ensure the best qualified candidate for every job
4. Review and revise the agency's return to work policy and program for injured workers

Objective B:

Improve work environments to respond to employee feedback

Strategies

1. Continue frequent, candid communications with staff and respond to employee surveys and other staff feedback.
2. Develop and implement actions to support workforce skills development and maintenance.
3. Improve safety practices through training and accountability for meeting safety standards.

2011-17 Strategic Plan



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